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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS  
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QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS,  
INCLUDING POLICIES OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AND SEGREGATION, IN ALL  
COUNTRIES, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO COLONIAL AND OTHER DEPENDENT  
COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES: REPORT OF THE SUB-COMMISSION UNDER  
COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS RESOLUTION 8 (XXIII)

Written statement\*/ submitted by the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, a non-governmental  
organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in  
accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[29 June 2001]

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\*/ This written statement is issued, unedited, as received in English, from the submitting non-  
governmental organization(s).

One of the most fundamental human rights is the right to religious freedom which has been enshrined in both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 18) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Articles 18 and 26). Special attention was drawn to this fundamental right when the Sub-Commission was charged, in accordance with its original mandate, to prevent discrimination of any kind relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms and to protect racial, religious, and linguistic minorities.

In acknowledgement and support of its mandate, the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR) takes this opportunity to report to the Sub-Commission on the deteriorating situation of religious freedom in Tibet. In doing so, the IFOR reminds the Sub-Commission of its resolution E/CN.4/Sub.2/91/10 in which it expressed its "concern at the continuing reports of violations of fundamental human rights and freedoms which threaten the destruction of the cultural, religious, and national identity of the Tibetan people" and called upon the Chinese government "fully to respect the fundamental human rights and freedoms of the Tibetan people."

Unfortunately, this appeal fell on deaf ears. In the ten years since the resolution was passed by the Sub-Commission, the situation of religious intolerance in Tibet has substantially worsened due to a systematic campaign on the part of the Chinese government authorities to promote atheism and to silence political dissent among clergy and lay persons. This campaign is wide-spread and increasing in intensity. It has resulted in the imprisonment of hundreds of monks and nuns and the banishment of thousands of others from their religious institutions. It is now estimated that more than 70% of the 451 current political prisoners in Tibet are clergy.

It is ironic to note that while Chinese authorities pride themselves in having funded the lavish renovation of certain well-known monasteries which serve as tourist attractions, these same institutions are being emptied from within by repressive political policies.

#### *1. The "Strike Hard" Campaign in Tibet 1996 - 2000*

In April 1996, the national "Strike Hard" campaign was launched in China. Although the official aim of the campaign was to combat crime and corruption, in Tibet it was directed against "splittist" activity, such as support for Tibetan independence and allegiance to the Dalai Lama.

As part of this campaign, Chinese "work teams" have been sent into monasteries and convents throughout Tibet to forcefully "re-educate" the resident monks and nuns on religious and patriotic beliefs as prescribed by the Chinese government. To achieve this, the "work teams" require them to sign a five point political pledge in which they must denounce the Dalai Lama, accept the Chinese-appointed Panchen Lama, oppose Tibetan independence, and recognize the authority of the Chinese government. Those who refuse face severe repercussions in the form of expulsion or arrest.

The "work teams" have the authority to set limits on the number of monks and nuns permitted to reside in religious institutions, to fix the minimum and maximum age limits of that clergy, and to enforce bans on the display of photographs of the Dalai Lama.

According to Chinese government sources, more than 30'000 of a total number of 46'300 monks and nuns had received "patriotic re-education" by the beginning of 1998. Almost all of the known 1'787 monasteries and temples have been reached by this drive. Since its beginning, it is reported that the campaign has resulted in 12'271 expulsions and more than 550 arrests. In the year 2000 alone, 862 monks and nuns were expelled with numerous arrests and one related death reported.

In addition to the expulsions and arrests, the campaign has also resulted in the closure of 22 monasteries and convents. A recent example was the closure of the Nag convent in Sichuan province in May 2000. The 130 resident nuns unanimously refused to sign the pledge denouncing the Dalai Lama. As a result, the "work team" closed and sealed the convent.

Clearly, the campaign is having an effect on eliminating dissent in monastic institutions throughout Tibet. Through the outside pressure of "work teams" and the establishment of resident so-called "Democratic Management Committees", responsible for admission, areas of curriculum, and discipline within the monasteries and convents, the government authorities have succeeded in setting up a system of control to ensure that monks and nuns assume Chinese "socialist" ideals in preference to traditional Tibetan Buddhist teachings. Indeed, the very future of the monastic tradition itself is in question.

In view of its success as a means of ideological control, in November 1997, the "Strike Hard" campaign was officially extended into the lay sector. Since then, thousands of rural peasants have been subjugated to "re-education", while hundreds of private homes have been raided in search of religious artifacts and pictures of the Dalai Lama.

Additional measures comprise restrictions on the public expression of belief. Recent examples include a ban on circumambulation around Lhasa during the festival of Saga Dawa in June 2000 and an announcement that the public celebration of the Dalai Lama's birthday in July has been declared "illegal". The incense-burning hearth in Lhasa where the celebration traditionally takes place was subsequently torn down and a hall to hold dance competitions was built on its ruins.

## *2. Recent Reports about the Expansion of the Campaign*

In June 2001, reports were published of the possible arrest of Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok, the chief abbot of the Serthar Buddhist Institute which is based in Kanze, in eastern Tibet, now incorporated into the Chinese province of Sichuan. In addition to his arrest, thousands of monks and nuns are reported to be in the process of being expelled from the institute in an effort by government authorities to reduce the population of resident clergy from approximately 10'000 to 1'500 persons. The clergy members who are expelled must return to their respective districts or countries and their vacated monastic cells will be demolished.

Government officials, who first issued their demands during an inspection of the institute in 1999, claim that they are acting upon instructions received directly from the central government in Beijing and from the provincial government in Chengdu. This level of intervention seems to indicate official concern at the growing popularity of the institute, rather than any anxiety about overt political dissent.

The Serthar Buddhist Institute received official government approval to operate as an educational institution in 1987. Since then it has become the center of a little known renaissance of Tibetan Buddhist learning, attracting a large number of Tibetan students in addition to at least one thousand monks of ethnic Chinese origin as well as foreigners from Singapore, Malaysia, and Hong Kong.

The status of the institute as an "academy" rather than as a formal monastic institution may be the reason why it was exempted from the restrictions imposed by the "patriotic re-education" campaign until now.

## *3. Chinese Denial of a Campaign to Promote Atheism in Tibet*

In a response to an inquiry by the Special Rapporteur on Religious Freedom and Belief, submitted as document A/55/280 to the 57th session of the Commission on Human Rights, the Chinese government denied conducting a campaign to promote atheism in Tibet. The facts on the ground, however, refute this claim. There is ample evidence to demonstrate that a systematic campaign is, in fact, underway and that it was initiated at the highest levels of government.

On 15 November 1998, for example, a senior government official in Tibet called for "bold propaganda about Marxist atheism ... (to instruct) the masses of peasantry and herdsmen about the Marxist stand on religion." Again, at a meeting of the TAR Party Propaganda Department on 8 January 1999, a directive was issued stating that "atheism is necessary to promote economic development in the region and to assist the struggle against the infiltration of the Dalai clique."

This campaign is directed at eliminating religious practice in every day life, urging Tibetans to abandon the age-old customs of relying on divination of oracles or seeking advice from senior religious persons or using prayer beads or even wearing traditional Tibetan garments in offices. As mentioned above, the promotion of atheism has gone hand in hand with an increasing number of restrictions on public expressions of belief, such as bans on hoisting prayer flags, burning incense, and perambulating holy sites.

## *4. Conclusion and Recommendation*

In conclusion, the IFOR regards the concerted efforts by Chinese government authorities to promote atheism in Tibet together with the repressive "Strike Hard" campaign as a serious infringement of the right of religious freedom and belief as it is upheld by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Mindful of the fact that China has signed, but not yet ratified the Covenant, the IFOR calls upon the Sub-Commission to review the restriction of religious freedom in Tibet at its current session.